

Peace



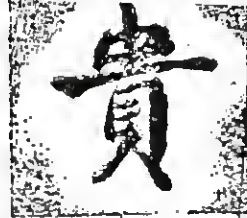
FORGIVENESS



WISDOM

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Dysfunction Junction



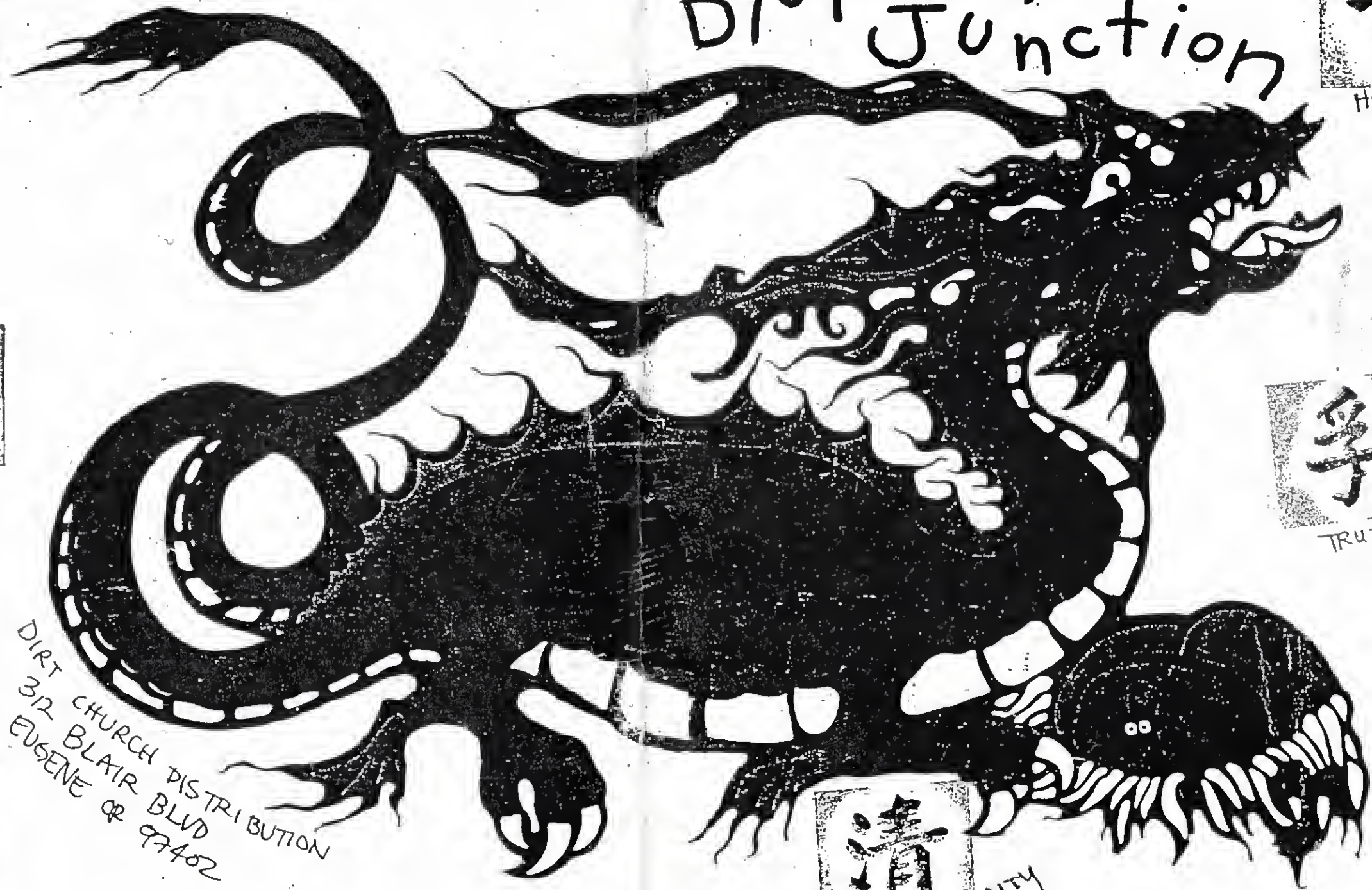
HONOR



TRUTH



CLARITY



AUTUMN 2001

\* in light of the fact that in order  
to have a functional community,  
we need to develop functional  
relationships, it would seem that  
a little healing and education  
are in order.....

this is a compilation  
of flyers & notes on constructive  
communication & conflict resolution

please  
contribute  
information to:  
dysfunction Junction  
312 BLAIR BLVD  
EUGENE OR 97402

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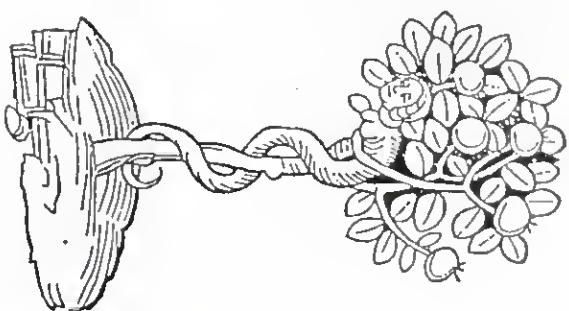
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"Community Counseling Services"  
LINDA de la Caccia Ed.M.  
484-4471

1508 Oak St. Eugene 97401  
LCC GRIEVE RESOLUTION  
INSTRUCTOR

WHITE BIRD CLINIC  
342-8255

OPTIONS counseling  
service of oregon  
1255 PEARL 687-6983  
SASS RECOMMENDED

SASS "Sexual Assault  
Services" (7247)  
SUPPORT SASS (4727)  
343-5488  
OR 1-800-  
343-5488

1-800-THERAPIST  
A free personalized  
referral service

Many counselors accept OHP & sliding scale

## THE POWER OF LISTENING

MAXIMIZE UNDERSTANDING - DEFUSING ANGER -  
DE-ESCALATING CONFLICT - RESOLVING CONFLICT - PROMOTING POSITIVE CHANGE

### Self Awareness

Use what you know about yourself to prepare for future actions including conflict.

- How do you generally behave in conflict situations?
- What can people do that stir up feelings of anger?
- When are you most likely to become defensive?
- What biases do you have that may show up in your interactions?
- What skills do you want to improve; what behaviors do you want to change?
- What are your strongest communication skills?
- How have you successfully handled conflict in the past?

patience  
love  
feeling emotions!  
diversity  
accepting / non-judgemental  
creativity  
making associations  
practicality / hands-on  
open-mindedness  
self reflection  
audial / visual

### Break the Flash Argument Cycle in the Heat of the Moment

- Try to recognize the speakers need to:
  - be heard - vent - get your attention
  - Demonstrate early that you intend to listen.
  - Be patient and let the speaker run for awhile.
  - Shut up and don't interrupt.
  - Focus and concentrate.
- Listen to understand the speaker's:
  - Values - Perceptions - Assumptions / suspicions - Intention - Needs
  - Listen for new information.
  - Listen with eyes, ears, heart and mind.

### Try to Empathize

Validate, Validate, Validate

- The grains of truth (sometimes boulders of truth)
- The basis of the suspicions
- Feelings
- Ask questions that help the other person express their view.
- Ask questions that clarify instead of building your case.
- Avoid mentally arguing with the other person while they are trying to talk to you.

examples  
questions  
trial by error  
modeling

### Avoid

- Antagonizing the speaker
- Pre-judgements
- "Boxing in" or "setting up" the speaker
- Listening in order to "destroy and conquer"
- Letting pride and ego rule
- "yes but"

osmosis  
imitation  
examining mistakes  
suffering  
reading  
interaction

LISTENING

## HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS & GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION

It's natural for people to have disputes and conflict occasionally. The following guidelines for good communication can help you get better results when working to resolve conflict situations in your life. Review these guidelines before you begin to resolve a conflict.

**TALK DIRECTLY:** Talk directly to the person that you are in conflict with. If you do not feel safe with the other party, use the phone. A two-way conversation is much more effective than sending a letter, banging on the wall, or complaining to someone else.

**CHOOSE A GOOD TIME TO TALK:** Plan to talk to the other person at a good time. Allow enough time for a thorough discussion. Don't start talking about the conflicts just as the other person is leaving for work, after you've had a terrible day, or just before you need to start dinner or the kids are coming home. Choose a quiet place where both parties can be comfortable and not disturbed for as long as the discussion takes.

**PLAN AHEAD:** Before you begin to talk directly to the party, think about the following. What do I want to say? How am I going to say it? How will other party take what is happening and what I have to say? What is the best way to start the conversation to allow a dialogue? Work on taking the issues(s) clearly in a way that the other party can hear.

**REMAIN CALM:** You can use your voice and body language convey calm. If you find yourself getting to a point where you can no longer speak calmly, ask for a short break. Use the break to calm yourself (walk around, get a drink of water). If you need more time, let the other party know that and make an arrangement to resume at another time.

**BE AWARE OF THE TYPES OF STATEMENTS YOU MAKE:** Talk about how you feel and what you are willing to do to resolve the issue. Making "I" statements that reflect how you feel, rather than accusing the other person can be effective. "I felt that the music in your apartment was too loud for me to sleep", is easier for the other party to hear than, "You were playing your stereo too loud". Be aware that opinions are not facts, and that each person involved has a point of view based on who/where they are.

**GIVE INFORMATION RATHER THAN INTERPRETING THE OTHER PERSON'S BEHAVIOR:** "You are blocking my driveway on purpose just to make me mad!", doesn't give the other party much room to respond without getting defensive. "When your car is parked over the driveway line, it is difficult for me to get my car out.", leaves room for response and discussion.

**BE RECEPTIVE TO WHAT THE OTHER PARTY HAS TO SAY, LISTEN:** If the other party feels you are open to what they have to say, they will probably be more receptive to what you have to say. A solution depends on each parties willingness to learn something from the others. Remember, you all have pieces of the puzzle. Listen to the information they offer rather than waiting to react.

## Caffeine/Coffee/Nicotine & Pain, Migraines, Sleep & Anxiety

by Ron Lechnyr, Ph.D., D.S.W.

Caffeine is a stimulant that "wakes" us and also helps us to "feel better." Sometimes we use it as an anti-depressant to help us feel better. The problem is that it is a "quick up and down." It also causes the blood vessels in our body to constrict and cut down on the nourishment to the body and muscles.

Caffeine also causes our body to tighten our muscles. When we have pain problems, caffeine actually makes the muscles, and other soft-tissue problems, worse. Some people have been able to handle caffeine prior to injuries, or having medical problems, only to find that later they are not able to handle caffeine at the same levels. It can make fibromyalgia, and other pain problems, much worse and more difficult to treat.

Caffeine also can cause "rebound headaches." When we do not take it we can wake up with a "coffee headache," because its job is to constrict the blood vessels in our body. When we do not have our "fix" of coffee each morning, the blood vessels in our head expand. They are waiting for the constriction effects of the caffeine. Without the caffeine the blood vessels go "bong-open."

It takes about two weeks to fully withdraw from caffeine. When we have "rebound headaches" we are addicted to the caffeine effects. When we "crave" a cup of coffee, we are addicted to it. Withdraw from it slowly by mixing it with water or decaf. Over two weeks, slowly mixing less and less caffeine in each cup with each day. You will have fewer problems with "abundant headaches" and you will not feel this way.

Caffeine causes nervousness, or just anxiety, attacks. If you are worrying excessively, or feel tense, tight, wound up, irritable, myrrer ventilation, tachycardia (fast heart beats), shaky, jittery, etc., you need to cut back on your intake of caffeine. One cup of coffee may not be a problem, but by the third one you might be more tense, hyperactive, reactive, overly-sensitive, and easily depressed. In a sense it "robs" the energy your body has saved for later in the day. If you use it now you may find yourself "crashing" later in the day. Caffeine is a stimulant like "speed" and can create many of the same negative effects from increased stress, depression, anxiety, "highs" and lows, and problems with sleep or medications.

Caffeine & Libido: Caffeine is a vaso-constrictor. This can reduce one's ability to respond sexually. Constriction of blood flow can result in a lack of orgasm and/or impotence in both men and women. This becomes more of a problem as the person ages-especially after age 40-50.

Caffeine taken four hours before sleep can delay normal sleep times by an additional four hours! Remember that there is caffeine in chocolate-like chocolate chip cookies.

Caffeine has been shown to CAUSE ARTHRITIS. A July, 2000 Finnish research study showed that those people who drank as little as three cups of coffee a day had a higher incidence of Rheumatoid Arthritis.

The diagnostic manual of mental and nervous disorders talks caffeine intoxication being at the level of 250 mgm of caffeine a day. There is 150 mgm of caffeine in a cup of coffee!

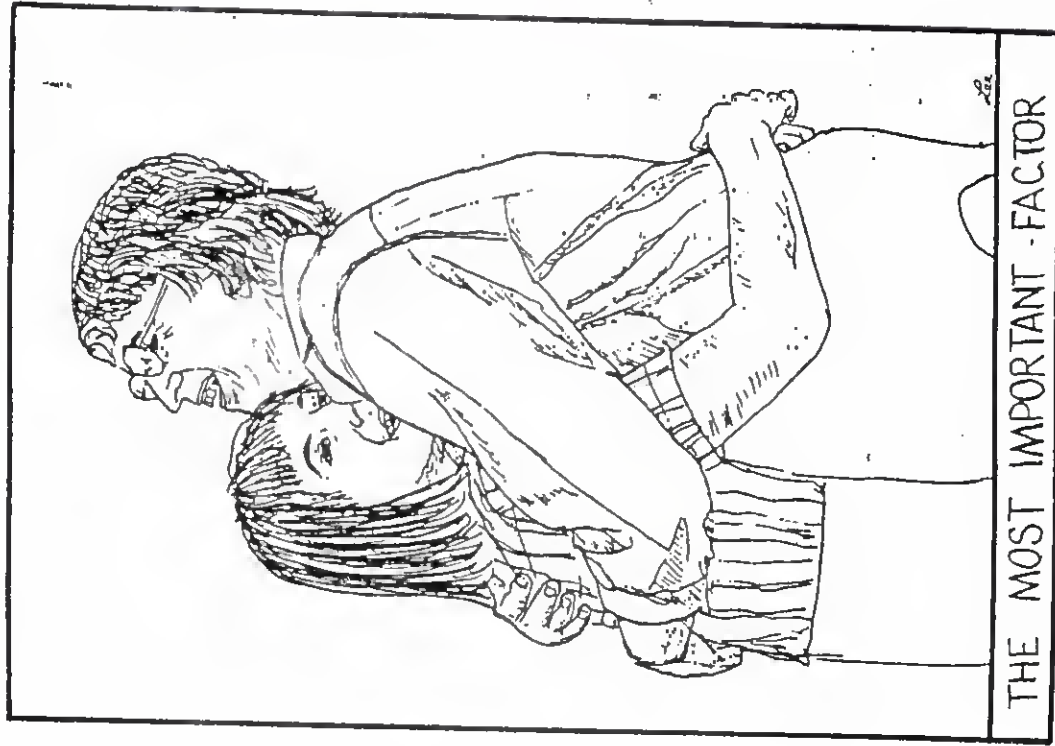
The same way with Tea, coke, Pepsi, Chocolate candy, "secret ingredient" in Anacin, all contain caffeine. Caffeine can be helpful in small doses and occasionally is fine. However, if you have physical and emotional problems or reactions that are a problem for you, or others, it is important to make changes in your caffeine intake. Many times we do not think that coffee is a problem for us until we start to withdraw from it and then notice the effects it had on our body. Other people though may comment on your hyperactivity, changeable moods, irritability, and many other problems.

Nicotine also constricts blood vessels! It is a drug that can both "give energy and calm one down" within six seconds nicotine "hits" the brain which provides for a powerful connection that "works" for people. It also, though, can slow healing because of the decreased flow of blood to injured areas. Patients who smoked had a poorer response to back, neck and other surgeries. They were more often classified as "surgical failures." It also keeps a person "addicted" and "tense and tight" while giving the impression that it is "calming one." Both caffeine and smoking have social benefits which usually allow one to be with other people, to take breaks, to "sit back and rest," and to gain "energy" to work harder and get going again.



This brief explanation of Constructive Criticism is only a beginning. It takes patience, practice and self-discipline to learn to do it effectively. Our fear of giving and receiving criticism is usually based on painful early experience, and consequently the urge to attack and counterattack (or crumble into self-loathing) is strong.

It is useful to remember that times of conflict hold the potential for change and growth. Constructive Criticism, with its emphasis on protection and education, can make transition times easier and more productive. It can be used by children and with children, if it is explained in simple terms. Because of the commitment to change implicit in its structure, it is a positive and dynamic approach to our interactions. The single most important factor in its use is the intention with which we start.



THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR

outer person says, let them know that you are hearing their points and information by your body language and eye contact. Looking away and/or crossing your arms will give the message that you are not listening. Saying "I hear you, I got it" does not mean you agree, only that you have heard.

**ASK FOR CLARIFICATION:** Effective communication is clear and simple. Don't assume you know what they are going to say or you know what they mean, listen to what they are saying. Ask questions such as "When you say.....do you mean.....?" or "What I hear you saying is....." "Is that right?"

**BE AWARE OF UNDERLYING ISSUES:** Be open to the fact that there may be some issues you aren't aware of. There may be unresolved issues from the past, maybe something changed in the living situation that has caused anger, etc.

**TALK IT THROUGH:** Once you start, get all of the issues and feelings out into the open. Don't leave out the part that seems "too difficult" or "insignificant" to discuss. The solution will work best if all the issues are discussed thoroughly.

**WORK ON A SOLUTION THAT WORKS FOR BOTH OF YOU:** Two or more people cooperating to find a solution is much more effective than one person telling the other what to do. Cooperative communication validates each person's view of reality. Be specific in your agreements. "I will turn off the music by midnight" is better than a vague "I won't play too loud any more." (and somewhat unrealistic!). Focus on what you are willing to do, rather than telling the other party what they must do.

**FOLLOW THROUGH:** Agree to check with each other at specific times to make sure that the agreement is still working....then really do it!

Our experience has shown that these simple suggestions can work. When people respect themselves, their neighbors, and their community enough to work out disputes, everyone wins!

STYLES } AVOID } COMPLETE  
CONFLICT } ACCOMMODATE } COMPROMISE  
COLLABORATE



Receiving Criticism: PREVENTING AND HANDLING DEFENSIVENESS  
GUIDELINE SEVEN: PREVENTING AND HANDLING DEFENSIVENESS

AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION IS VALIDATION. Even if you disagree, be sure to listen actively to what's being said.

VALIDATION

Paraphrase what the speaker is saying by focusing on their feelings. Some of the following "lead-in" phrases may be useful:

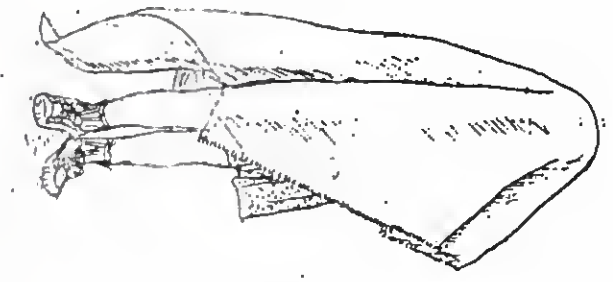
I hear that .....  
 I see that .....  
 I understand that .....  
 I sense that .....  
 My sense is that you .....  
 I pick up that .....  
 It seems that .....  
 I assume that you mean ...  
 I believe what you are saying is ....  
 So what I get is .....  
 So how you see it is .....  
 So what you would prefer is .....  
 What I now realize is .....  
 That must be (tough).  
 You sound (frustrated).  
 What's coming across is .....

↓  
 bc  
 SINCERE  
 ~~~~~

Lead-in phrases can also be omitted such as: \*

Tough situation!  
 Hard place to be.  
 How frustrating!  
 That's a real dilemma.  
 What a relief!

\*It is important in your summarizing how the other person feels that you keep open to the fact that what you think you heard may not be what they sent. Watch for projecting your feelings onto their situation.



PREVENTING AND HANDLING DEFENSIVENESS

No matter how constructively we give a criticism, we will sometimes encounter defensiveness. Constructive Criticism is not a magic solution that will solve our communication problems instantly. It is a discipline whose practice over time can reduce the number of mistakes we make with each other and decrease our defensiveness and the self-trashing that we have learned to do because of painful experience. Here are some things you can do to prevent or handle defensive reactions:

1. You can ask in advance for the other person to paraphrase what you are going to say.
2. If you have a fear that the other person will misinterpret what you say in a particular way, you can give her information that will prevent that misinterpretation: 'I want you to know that I like a lot of how you parent Jesse, and my criticism is about one particular aspect of your relationship with her.'
3. If, after you have given the criticism, you think the other person has misinterpreted what you said, you can check that out: 'My hunch is that my criticism came across to you as a put-down, is that right?'
4. When you are getting a defensive reaction, you can empathize. You can say, 'It sounds like you're really hurt and angry, and you think I'm underestimating your work, is that right?' You can then clear up the original misinterpretation and have the other person paraphrase you to be sure your criticism is being understood.

maximum amount of information we can get from the criticism.

### Receiving Criticism:

#### GUIDELINE FIVE: PARAPHRASING

To paraphrase is simply to say back to the other person your understanding of what s/he has said. This does two things. It assures the other person that you have understood what s/he is saying (or gives her a chance to clarify), and it gives you a chance to pause and check your impulse to come back quickly with defensive arguments. In saying back to the other person what you have heard, it is important not to parrot her words, but to say what you have heard her saying in your own words.



### Receiving Criticism:

#### GUIDELINE SIX: EMPATHIZING

Empathizing is a valuable skill to use in those instances when we are receiving unclear criticism. To empathize is to 'put yourself in the other person's shoes' and try to imagine what is going on for her. Your use of this guideline will demonstrate your caring for the person doing the criticism. It will also help you to extract the four pieces of information you need from the criticism: (1) What did I do? (2) How does the other person feel about it? (3) What does she want me to do instead? (4) Why?

If someone says to me, 'I get the feeling you don't value other people's contribution to this group', s/he hasn't given me much concrete information about what I've done. If I can resist the temptation to fight back defensively, and remember to empathize, I may gain some insight into how I appear to others. I can say something like, 'You seem angry to me. I know that I've talked quite a bit in this meeting, and I'm imagining you want to hear more from others, so that different points of view can be represented, is that right?'

I'm not suggesting that we encourage others to dump on us. However, if we don't know the other person well, it is usually a good idea to let her see that we care about her opinion and want to learn from her. Criticizing her style of expressing it can come after she knows she has been heard.

State your boundaries using the minimal amount of force necessary to make your point. Consider what phrasing "fits" you as well as the "gentle", "firm", and "extra-firm" approaches.

### Gentle

1. Would you please ....  
2. I need to regroup and do (this) instead.  
3. I need more time to ....  
4. I think we see (this issue) differently.  
5. My preference is that we ....  
6. I think (this idea) would work out better.  
7. What would work for me is ....  
8. My idea is ....  
9. I need more time to consider what you have said ....  
10. I'd rather you ....

try  
this  
first

No DON'TS or WANTS or STAKES needs

encourages a  
positive action

### Firm

1. It won't work out for me to ....
2. I ask that you not ....
3. I'm uncomfortable with your ....
4. I'd like you to (send those papers) today.
5. I really don't want to ...
6. I prefer that you not ....
7. I don't feel good about ....
8. I'm not willing to ....
9. I'm not interested in ....
10. Ouch, that hurts!
11. I don't think that's a good idea.
12. I'm not ready to ....

try  
this

### Extra-Firm

1. No, Don't, Stop, Hold it!
2. I refuse to be (insulted)!
3. I don't do ("bitch").
4. I find that behavior (condescending)! insulting, rude etc.
5. That feels rotten!
6. I've had enough ( Basta ya!)
7. I'm hanging up/leaving!
8. Good-bye.

let  
go

EXTRA-FIRM IS STILL CALM & NON-AGGRESSIVE



LEARN the DIFFERENCES

BETWEEN PASSIVE,  
ASSERTIVE, AGGRESSIVE &  
PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE





PASSIVE

vague  
soft  
"feminine"  
compliant  
agreeable  
accommodating  
self-denying  
avoid hassle  
powerless  
mindless  
wishy-washy  
unresponsive  
neutral  
overlooking  
accepting

ASSERTIVE

clear  
direct  
open  
flexible  
friendly  
predictable  
collaborative  
cooperative  
fair  
thoughtful  
confident  
helpful  
reasonable  
genuine  
firm  
appropriate

AGGRESSIVE

bold  
"masculine"  
hostile  
threatening  
intimidating  
efficient  
ruthless  
proud  
provocative  
indignant  
pushy  
demanding  
harsh  
over-powering  
punitive

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE

complaining  
sullen  
aloof  
condescending  
disapproving  
rigid  
ignoring  
arrogant  
withdrawn  
rejecting  
coy  
sarcastic

ADJECTIVES THAT DESCRIBE THESE FOUR BEHAVIOURS

PASSIVE  
vague and indirect  
behaviours.  
What you think and  
feel is not impor-  
tant enough to say.  
What the other per-  
son thinks and feels  
is important enough  
to listen to.  
Decisions are made  
by someone else; you  
go along with what  
is decided.

ASSERTIVE  
1. Clear and direct  
behaviours.  
2. What you think and  
feel is important  
enough to say and  
what the other per-  
son thinks and feels  
is important enough  
to listen to.  
3. Decisions are made  
through cooperation,  
collaboration and  
compromise.

AGGRESSIVE  
1. Clear and direct  
behaviours.  
2. What you think and  
feel is important  
enough to say. What  
the other person  
thinks and feels is  
not important enough  
to listen to.  
3. Decisions are made  
unilaterally--without  
discussion, collabora-  
tion or compromise.

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE  
1. Vague, indirect and  
giving double messages.  
2. What you think and  
feel is not important  
enough to say and what  
the other person  
thinks and feels is  
not important enough  
to listen to.  
3. Decisions are made by  
someone else, but al-  
though you may agree  
to the decision, you  
also will block the  
decision.



STATING REASONS

Gracie Lyons suggests a form to help remember the four parts of Constructive Criticism: When you do (A), I feel (B) and I want you to do (C) because (D). I have found the form helpful when I have been struggling to learn Constructive Criticism. The most important thing to remember is that to make a really effective criticism, one that gives maximum information for the other person to act on, you need to give four pieces of information: (1) What the person did, (2) How you feel about that, (3) What you want her to do instead, and (4) Why.

Here is an example of a Constructive Criticism:  
"When you didn't complete your part of the work on the poster on time, I felt anxious and quite angry. When you take on publicity work in the future, I want you to set aside a definite time to do the work. If you're having trouble doing it, I want you to bring it up in a meeting for problem-solving so that the publicity can be ready in time, because it is very important that we have a good attendance at these meetings in order to ensure the success of the project."

The first four guidelines have to do with how we give criticism, but how we receive criticism is at least as important. Often we keep good ideas to ourselves because we are afraid that suggesting them will result in anger and defensiveness from the other person. When we react to criticism caringly and with a willingness to learn, we





feelings and thoughts or ideas. The sentence, 'I feel misunderstood' or 'I feel condescended to' is not about a feeling, but expresses an idea or hunch about the other person's internal process. The actual feeling is more likely to be fear or anger. What we are trying to describe is our emotional response to someone's behavior, not our guesses about what s/he is up to. The use of the phrase 'I feel like...' or 'I feel that...' is a certain indication that a suspicion about someone's motives is about to be described. Try to use simple feeling words when following Guideline Two.

How to do Criticism:

#### GUIDELINE THREE: STATING WANTS

In this part of the Constructive Criticism, we ask for the change in behavior we want. This is useful for the person being criticized because it gives her an idea of how she can change. In suggesting specific behavior changes, we involve ourselves in cooperative problem-solving and do not put the individual receiving the criticism in the position of having to figure out for herself how to solve the problem. She can judge whether the change we ask for is a useful one, and whether it is possible for her.

How to do Criticism:

#### GUIDELINE FOUR: STATING REASONS

The purpose of using this guideline is to let the other person know why we think the suggested change is more likely to help us achieve our aims than the previous behavior. Consistently using Guidelines Three and Four has been an important practice for me. Thinking about the behavior I want to ask for, and articulating the reasons for those requests has forced me to clarify my political thinking and develop strategies for achieving the political ends I am working towards. This has helped me to overcome my training as a working class person and as a woman to discount my ability to analyze and strategize.

## FUNCTIONAL & DYSFUNCTIONAL PEOPLE/FAMILIES: THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

by  
Ron Lechnyr, Ph.D., O.S.W.

Psychologists are frequently asked to *define the difference between functional and dysfunctional people and families*. Others say that they have never known of a functional person or family and feel that most of us have grown up in dysfunctional situations. It does help to have some information that can help you as you think about how you want to change and face life:

### The Four Rules Of Dysfunctional:

- **Don't Talk About Problems—or Anything:** Dysfunctional families, and people, actually believe that the best way to handle problems is to avoid talking about them. There is a concern that if people spend time talking about problems it will only "give others ideas" and make things worse. This will then result in more of an upset than they want to face or handle!
- **Don't Think About Issues:** Dysfunctional people believe that thinking about issues and problems will also make things worse, give others too many ideas, and cause everyone more problems. "Out of sight is seen as being out of mind" to them. There is a magical belief that if they don't think about it that the problems will go away or at least be forgotten about.
- **Don't Feel or Have Feelings:** Dysfunctional people believe that one should not have feelings about many situations in life. If they can avoid feeling the emotions of problems then things will be better for them—or at least this is what is hoped for. Others are told to "stop feeling that way" even though it is impossible to "stop feelings." All that happens when others deny, or suppress, feelings is that these feelings are "internalized in the body" and "later explode over small things." This only causes more physical and interpersonal problems later on which others then do not understand because the feelings seem to be "blown out of proportion to the situation." This actually is true when others hold in things so long that when the emotions do come out many issues are "being exploded at once."
- **Don't Do Anything To Resolve, or Change, Things At All Possible Costs!** In dysfunctional families, problems are to be avoided no matter what happens. Doing anything to work on resolving ~~them~~ *beings* up too many fears and emotions that dysfunctional people have difficulties in handling. They have few words to handle the many different things that come up in a family so instead of learning different ways of doing or talking about things, they work hard to avoid any resolution of problems. This then builds more and more unresolved problems which can become overwhelming at times.

### What Functional Families Know:

- When researchers have studied "strong functional families" they have found several characteristics that they have in common.
- The most important one is that **STRONG FAMILIES HAVE PROBLEMS!** *The difference is that they admit to them, examine them, work to find solutions, and seek out help when it is appropriate to solving them.*
- *Dysfunctional families can have a "large pile of problems in front of them" which they will deny, avoid, not acknowledge, and, in fact, walk around while thinking how good they have things even when the problems are major obstacles to families and their individual members.*
- *Strong families also spend time together, communicate, allow for individual differences among family members, seek out a higher spiritual meaning in life, show open verbal and physical appreciation for each other, and work to help each person in the family reach their full potential.*
- *It is not that anyone is without problems. The only difference is that strong families are open to seeing and dealing with their problems and most importantly **FINDING SOLUTIONS!***
- Others just want to "pretend" that everything is okay until it is "too late." Then they can tell others that "they never really knew there was a problem!" This allows them to avoid any responsibility for dealing with, or changing, things in positive growth producing ways.
- Functional families do things to make improvements realizing that solutions may take time, involve emotional upsets, and be difficult for everyone to handle. *How are WE going to solve it!*
- Everyone thinks that other families have better situations, children, outcomes, whatever. The truth is that everyone has problems of one sort or another, at one time or another, and in different degrees.
- *The goal in life is not to be without problems. The goal is to "love one another" and work to better ourselves and achieve our best potential in life!*

# Dealing with Anger

Psychologists know that learning to deal with angry feelings is critical to our physical, emotional and interpersonal health. We also know that there is a difference between *feeling angry* and *what we do about our anger*. Here are a few tips:

## Anger & You:

- Everyone gets angry at times in their lives.
- We many times have good reasons to be angry.
- Sometimes though we get angry, or upset and irritable, for no particular reasons at all.
- Whether our anger is right or wrong, it is critical that we learn how to handle our feelings in ways that are helpful and accomplish what we want.

## Angry Explosions:

- "Spraying" our anger out whenever we are upset only causes more problems.
- We have to learn to handle our anger in ways that do not get us in more trouble.
- We have to be able to find ways of "getting it off our chest" and saying what is bothering us without it "eating us up inside."
- We have to find ways of stating what we feel in ways that gets us what we need - rather than less of what we need.

Anger happens when we feel (1) "It isn't fair," (2) we feel wrongly treated or not understood; (3) we feel that others do not understand us or our needs; (4) we feel neglected and unloved; (5) others are doing hurtful things to us; (6) when what someone does reminds us of pains and problems from the past (childhood issues with our parents); and (7) when we feel out of control in some way.

We also sometimes have a temperament that is easily set off and we find ourselves in the middle of being angry and upset even before we are aware that something has happened—too reactive.

## What To Do:

**Wait:** Stepping back and not reacting immediately can help defuse the situation for you and the other person. You can wait until you are more relaxed and more in charge rather than being a victim of your own feelings and intentions.

**Talk:** Talking is involves listening first to the other person. It does not mean telling them how you feel or how they should react to you. It is having a give and take conversation where you are willing to listen to the other person express themselves and figure out things for themselves.

**Learn To Take "No": For An Answer:** Even if you do not agree with the other person, feel it is unfair, or you have the wrong decision, you have to respect the other person's right to make decisions. You can disagree but only if you understand that you have to accept their response. When others come to see that you will respect their decision, even if you don't agree with it, they will start to be more open to your ideas over time.

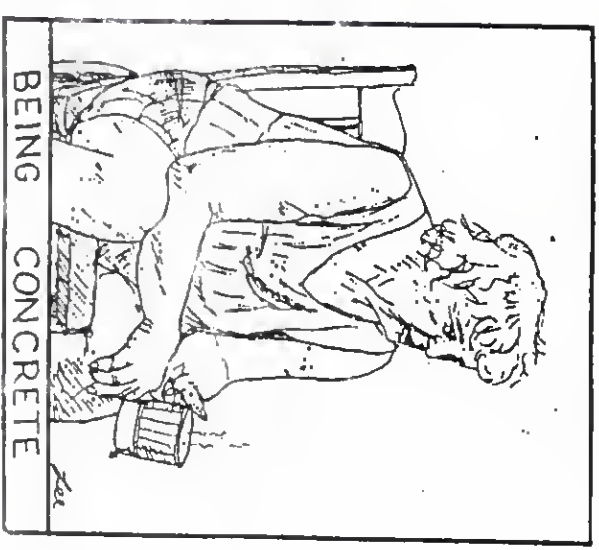
**When angry & upset, work off the energy:** Do something physical to calm down and get the energy out of your body and mind. Take a walk, exercise, clean, organize things, take a bike ride, but don't break things, trash things, slam doors, or hit, push and shove.

**Think Of What You Can Do To Resolve Things:** It is always easy to know what others should do to resolve things. The challenge is to think of what you can do to solve it too. Usually it takes two to be upset and two to solve things. Show others that you are willing to compromise and think of how you can do it better—even if they are not willing to do the same.

**Remember, You Won't Die & The World Will Not End If You Don't Get Your Way Or the Point Across:** There is a saying: Don't sweat the small stuff, and all the stuff is small stuff. Sometimes we make things bigger than they need to be at the moment. Life goes on. There will be another day and time to work on these things. It is not the end of the world.

## How to do Criticism: GUIDELINE ONE: BEING CONCRETE

It is very important when giving criticism to describe actual behavior. We need to separate subjective opinions from objective facts. We say, "Helen, you've been late to

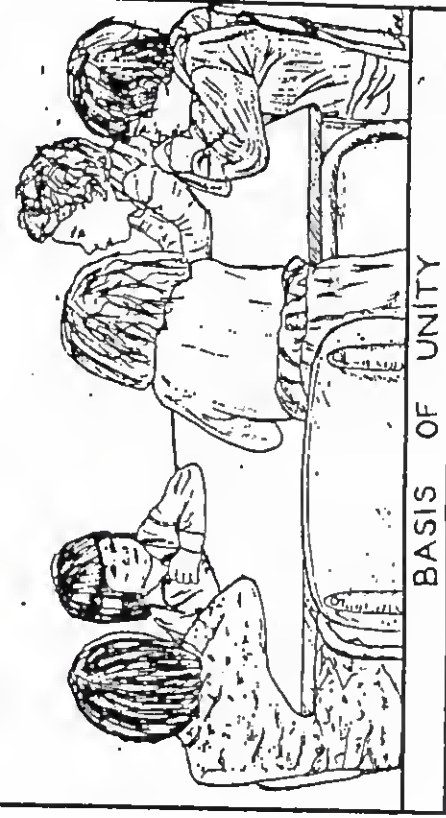


the last three meetings' rather than 'You're being irresponsible' or 'You don't seem to value our time'. We let the person know what it is in her behavior that is a problem for us rather than making judgements about her character or imputing motives. We try to give as much detail as possible — what she did, when, how often — so that she has useful information to work with. Most of us have had the experience of being criticized in ways that hurt us, and we tend to feel scared and act defensively when we know we are about to be criticized. We can reduce the fear of criticism between ourselves by giving each other concrete descriptions of actual behavior when we criticize, rather than using labels and judgements.

## How to do Criticism: GUIDELINE TWO: DESCRIBING FEELINGS

As Gracie says, 'Clarifying feelings can do several things: first, it can help to get a handle on my feelings so they don't go underground, outside my conscious control, where they could burst out in destructive ways. Second, by verbalizing feelings I can let the other person know where I'm at in a way that makes me humanly accessible to her. Describing my feelings encourages me to take responsibility for my own end of the contradiction, and thus avoid laying the blame entirely on the other person. Next, explicitly describing my feelings cuts down the chances that someone will misread my emotions. For instance, if I don't tell people that I'm nervous ... they will often think I am acting cold.' So, after describing the behavior, we state our feeling reaction: 'When you were late for the meeting, I felt angry.' It is important to make the distinction between

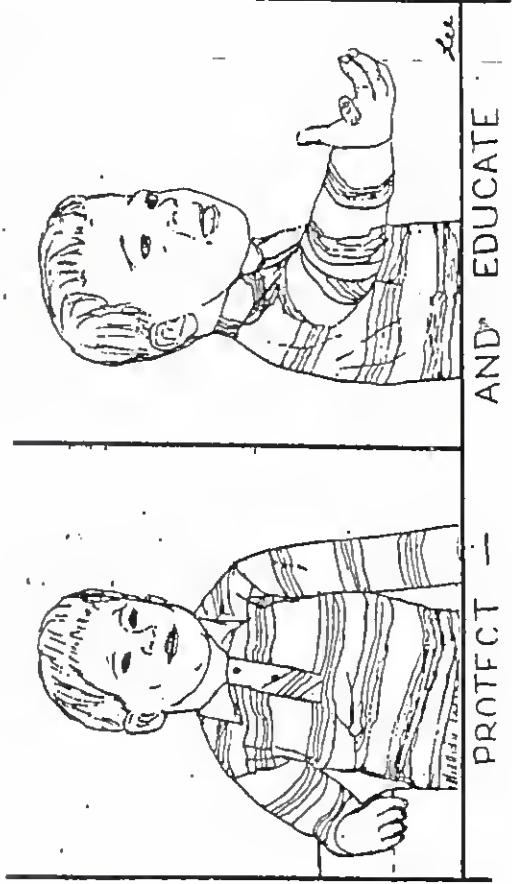




work. Political work can be frustrating. When we turn our justifiable anger at the oppressive institutions that control so much of our lives against each other, we do the work of our enemies for them. That is why the first of the eight guidelines that Gracie Lyons gives for giving and receiving criticism is called:

#### GUIDELINE ZERO: THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING GOOD INTENTIONS

Before giving a Constructive Criticism, it is important to check your feelings toward the person involved. Do you feel angry and resentful and want to punish her or show her how stupid you think she's being? It may be useful to do some work to disperse that emotional charge before you give the criticism. To constructively criticize someone means to attempt to convince her that she is acting in a way that is unjustifiable in terms of her own political principles and goals. We start from a desire for greater unity with the person we criticize, to 'protect and educate' her, as Lyons describes it, not to punish and coerce. This is the most important part of giving a criticism. It is helpful to ask if the other person is willing to hear a criticism right now, and to make a time to deal with it if she is not. We all have days when we find it more than usually difficult to hear criticism.



from the very beginning. Sometimes we feel that if others really loved us they would act differently toward us. We forget that sometimes others are frustrated, tired, upset, angry, etc., themselves. This can affect how they respond to us. Don't let yourself feel that you are not loved by the other person and then want to "get back at them" for "doing that to you."

**Remember Others Can't Read Your Mind Or Needs:** Unless you tell others how you feel, what you intend, they do not understand what you are meaning, want, or feel. Don't expect them to "just know." **When Upset Zip The Lips:** When we are upset we tend to say things that we don't mean at the time. This usually makes the situation much worse and we will regret it later. By giving yourself time to calm down you are actually MORE in control than if you just jumped in and stated your anger.

**Know That No One Always Gets Their Way:** We have to learn to compromise and learn to get along with others. Many times our upsets are just temper tantrums of insistence of wanting things our way—right now!

**Stop & Take A Cool Drink of Water:** One way of cooling down is to stop and take a drink—of water and not alcohol. This helps us cool down, relax, and gives us time to think better. It puts us back in control. **Breathe:** We tend to rush around and stop breathing. Taking two deep breaths, dropping our jaw, and imagine feeling warmth and heaviness flowing from our heads down to our toes make a lot of difference. **Get The Tensions Out Other Ways:** Hit pillows, throw things at cans, kick cans, etc.

**Be More Compassionate With Yourself:** Sometimes the reason we get upset is because we push ourselves too hard, feel we are not accomplishing enough, or become impatient and want things right away. Slow down and enjoy yourself more.

**Pace Yourself & Your Activities Better:** In our rush to do things faster, better, and right now, we accomplish far less than we want. It is more helpful to take things slowly and with more ease. Don't try to do everything when you feel good. Rushing, doing all, and then becoming exhausted will only make things worse.

**CATCH OTHER PEOPLE DOING THINGS RIGHT:** We many time look for the problems and difficulties and then "tell the other person what they need to do to change." This never works well. Instead work on finding the little things that people do right and praise them for it. This will surprise them and encourage them to do more of it.

**Tell The Other People In Your Life That You Love Them:** Sometimes we forget to tell people we love and cherish them. Others need to hear from us that we love them. It is hard to share tender feelings, especially for men, but it is critical that we do it. Hugging, loving, telling others you value them makes the other person feel safe and comfortable with you. They also want to do more things to please you.

**Yelling at Others to "Make Them Change" Is only a temporary fix:** You can work yourself up into a rage pushing others because of their "incompetence and resistance to changing and seeing things the correct way—your way." You have to learn to accept others the way they are, learn to talk out problems and realize that no one things the same way you do. If you are forceful and get things done right away, you probably have a spouse who is just the opposite—to balance you out.



Magazine about CONFLICT & DEMONIFICATION...



## COMMUNITY MEMBER AS 'LIGHTNING ROD'

BY HARVEY BAKER

**O**VER MY YEARS AT DUNMIRE HOLLOW, I have several times heard people who were leaving or had recently left say, "I could never live in Dunmire Hollow again as long as So-and-So lives here." The person named always seemed the most difficult to live with—often angry, insensitive, abrasive, or some combination of these. It seemed curious to me that, after the first such person left our community, these remarks were almost immediately directed at a different community member.

Similarly, I was always the slowest in our community, sometimes generating impatience from others. Then Bill began living with us, giving new meaning to the word "slow." Suddenly I was only "kinda slow" instead of "real slow." The group's impatience with slowness began to be directed at Bill.

From these and other experiences in small groups, I have made the following observations:

1) Given any small group and any personality characteristic, there is always one person in the group who has the characteristic the most (OK, there might occasionally be a tie.) This is not a very profound observation. At any given time, someone is always the shortest, tallest, thinnest, smartest, loudest, or whatever.

2) When our group attaches negative labels to the characteristic (e.g., "angry," "insensitivity," "laziness," "materialism," even certain leadership

please the  
take time to  
LEARN &  
practice  
this  
stuff!



when we find ourselves working with women from a more advantaged class background. Women from what is commonly referred to as a 'middle class background' are more likely to have had more reinforcement within their families for developing verbal skills and having creative ideas about how to run things. Even though they have frequently been expected to sacrifice career development to husbands and children, they have often had training for jobs in management professional and academic fields. This is a very different experience from the usual lower working class experience of training to take orders, rather than give orders, ~~and~~ the job. Saying 'We're all women here and we're all equal' does not change that experience. Our ideas about ourselves, and the learned behavior that stems from our different positions in society often need to be changed in order for the group to work to its potential. We all have different skills and knowledge to contribute to the group. Through careful handling of resentments and criticisms, we can learn from each other's experiences.

One of the most useful ways I have found to teach each other how to do collective work is through the use of Constructive Criticism. I first learned of this method of handling political differences through reading Gracie Lyons' handbook, *Constructive Criticism* (P.O. Box 5039, Berkeley, California 94705; Issues in Radical Therapy, 1976). This method of communication, and the philosophy upon which it is based, helps us to identify behavior that impedes the work of the group, to examine the ideas and attitudes from which that behavior arises, and make positive suggestions for change. This article is a summary of some of the ideas I learned from Gracie Lyons' book.

### BASIS OF UNITY

Defining areas or principles of agreement is called establishing a basis of unity. We need to know for certain what it is we agree on, and what it is we are trying to change, before we can effectively set about changing it. I have learned through painful experience that it is a mistake to make assumptions about what members of a group agree on. Writing a statement of principles and goals helps us to clarify differences, and gives us a reference point to guide our actions. It reminds us, in the heat of discussion, why we have chosen to work together, and that we are comrades in that



To undertake the work of transforming ourselves so that we can transform society is no easy task. The people who have control in any social system must ensure that its institutions reinforce the values that maintain their power, or they stand in danger of losing it. Our training in those values begins early — in the family, and in the education system. The mass media surrounds us with images that strengthen and maintain that learning.

As feminists, we have some understanding of how that training works. To confront and begin to change institutionalized sexism we have had to confront and change those behaviors in ourselves which serve our oppressors. We have needed to acknowledge how fully patriarchal values have permeated our consciousness. We came together in consciousness-raising groups to share our experiences, learn from each other, and give each other the support we need to make huge changes in our lives. Our experiences had taught us to mistrust organizational structures that gave one person more power than another, and so we formed collectives. We organized health collectives, shelters for battered women, feminist counselling centres, and rape crisis centres. We wrote newspapers and set up women's coffee houses and resource centres. The work that we have done in challenging the patriarchy has been enormous; it has required not only organizational effort, but also the work of changing our societally-trained ideas of ourselves as women. We have had to learn to listen to each other instead of the voice of male authority.

But the patriarchy is not the only oppressive system we must fight. We live within an economic system, capitalism, that is organized around the profit motive rather than meeting human needs. Rather than seeing the earth's resources as being for us all to share, men are taught to compete for those resources, and women are taught to provide the nurture and support that men need to take part in that competition. As children we are raised in the nuclear family, where one woman is expected to give us everything we need — food, moral guidance, comfort and love — and we learn early to compete with our siblings for her attention. Our attitudes are further shaped by an education system that teaches us to compete with each other for academic status.

Part of the belief system that supports capitalism is the belief in the myth of equal opportunity. We are taught that anyone who works hard can get ahead, can make it on her or his own merit as an individual. We learn to blame ourselves and each other for our failure to do so. In this way we act as our own oppressors. This belief in 'rugged individualism' denies our interconnectedness and responsibility for each other as human beings. It ignores the fact that we live our lives in a network of unequal power relationships where some people have more advantages than others. Often when we come together in feminist collectives, we find that our work is hindered by this life-long training in individualism and competition.

To learn to work so that each of us can contribute to the leadership of a group is a difficult task, one for which we have little training. When we examine our attitudes toward taking on leadership responsibilities, we often find that we are subtly yet powerfully influenced by our class background. Those of us whose training has been for jobs in which we take orders and provide service (such as clerical, waitress, or factory work), or whose work has been inside the home, are often at a disadvantage

qualities), the person at the extreme attracts all the group's negative energy about that attribute. We can call this person the "lightning rod": the person who sticks up the most gets the heat.

3) We exaggerate the degree of difference between the person with the highest amount of any characteristic and the rest of the group, which masks the presence of that characteristic in everyone else. The extreme person then defines/embodyes the concept for the group. For example, we often react most strongly to attributes (such as coveting material possessions) in others that we dislike in ourselves. By rejecting another who is identified with that attribute and pushing that person farther from us, we lessen our own internal tensions. We reassure ourselves that we're not really materialistic, he's being materialistic (with a point of the finger). There is also the reassurance that everybody else in the group agrees with us that must make it true. Our focused attention can create a downward feedback spiral that actually increases and hardens the person's negative behavior. If the person is already judged, convicted, and punished for being worse than they really are, the person might as well indulge in as much of the behavior as they want. This further distances the extreme person from the rest of us.

4) Only when the "angriest" or "laziest" person leaves does that negative quality seem to magically spring up in another person, though it was there unnoticed all along. Our focused attention can make the previously unnoticed characteristic now seem extreme, and can again create a feedback spiral that worsens the person's negative behavior.

5) The more closed and isolated a group is from the rest of the world, the less people outside the group count compared to people inside it. The more we focus only on our small group, the more personal differences

are magnified within it. The more the internal differences are magnified, the more extreme the lightning rod effect can be. On the other hand, the more we see our group as a part of the whole human race, the less the lightning rod person is perceived as extreme, diminishing our negative energy toward him or her. When we work within this larger global perspective, we realize that in our group, the extremes are actually very close together. On a theoretical scale from 1 to 10, we might encompass an actual range from 3.2 to 4.8, though we would make it feel like a range from 1 to 10. If the "4.8" person leaves the group, we might have a new range from 3.2 to 4.5. Yet our

unpleasant (and often surprisingly rewarding) task of dealing with each other and ourselves. This task is made even more daunting by the momentum that groups of people can build up by mutual reinforcement. It's hard enough to change our personal ways of operating; changing how our groups operate can be downright intimidating. Besides having to pit our individual energy against the considerable energy/momentum of the rest of the group, we risk being labeled extreme in our idealism. In fact, being the extreme person for an officially good characteristic can leave us a target for cynicism, envy, and marginalization.

## There is always one person in the group who has any given characteristic the most.

tendency is to magnify that new range so it still feels like a range from 1 to 10. And, as noted above, virtually all the expansion occurs between the most extreme person and the next most extreme.

Our societal model is to demonize, isolate, and exclude such "extreme" people from our lives and our groups. It's so easy to think, "Our group would be so perfect if only So-and-So were gone!" Unfortunately, we now see that once we start down this seemingly easy road, there is no end to it until we are a group of one person. It is clear that the same mechanism, the same distortions, the same tendency to isolate and exclude can operate in couples just as it does in larger groups.

(And even for a group of one, the struggle can go on internally as we try to wall off or exclude parts of ourselves we don't like: "I'd be perfect if only I..." The other option is to take on the often difficult, potentially

Fortunately, if we need motivation to improve our group behavior, there are a number of possible benefits we might receive by intentionally changing how we treat such "extreme" lighting rod persons. Instead of isolating and excluding, we can recognize the same tendencies in ourselves, build bridges to the people at the edges, and believe they have contributions to make to the group. Consider the possible benefits:

First, as our groups operate with more integrity, avoiding scapegoating, gossip, and demonizing, we learn to trust them more, and put ourselves more whole-heartedly into them and their operation. As we operate our groups in ways that honor and uphold both the group and all its members, we can acquire both a stronger sense of self and a better feeling of ourselves as part of an effective, honest, caring group. Second, we may get opportunities to practice better interpersonal skills,

afflict resolution, tolerance, and so person/people in the conflict, accepting no responsibility for their part in the struggle. Those of us caught in the struggle decided to bring in an outside expert to increase the trust, commitment, and skills. We were frustrated but not surprised that those who most needed the help refused to participate. We continued to put slow steady pressure on them to grow in this area; most of them chose instead to leave the community. Calling in an outside expert in a crisis has a low probability of success. Developing



## AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

In spite of the "lightning rod" phenomenon, there are times when, for good reasons, a group may want to take on a lightning rod. We may identify characteristics in potential new members that might indicate a high risk of their generating later problems. We may have a history of difficulty and connection that a group of people has with a particular person or place and vulnerable. It is the responsibility of each member to address the community to nourish and protect it. There may be a correct balance between nourishing and protecting; nourishing can mean bringing in new fertilizer (new members with new perspectives, enthusiasts, and energy); protecting can involve not accepting risky new people. Each community must find its own balance point between risk and safety. This balance point may change over time, as the needs and strengths of the group vary. At any given time, a group's physical and interpersonal resources are limited; choosing carefully which people (and how many) to try to integrate can make the most efficient use of these limited resources. In my experience, "red flags" for high risk occur in potential new members who:

- have not gotten their financial trip together before they come,
- want to get away from it all,
- expect that living in community will be easy,
- must have everything they want in terms of physical comfort, work assignments, and so forth soon after joining the community,
- have few or no on-going connections to family, friends, or people from their previous living and working arrangements,
- appear to be "hiding from themselves,"
- lie or steal,
- blame everybody/everything else for their problems and/or failures,
- are looking for authority figures to rebel against.

-H.B.

personal and interpersonal problems can carry us through the bigger challenges that might otherwise tear us apart. Third, the "extreme" person may be doing valuable work for us in identifying problems and calling for our attention and resources to resolve them. Many times we would rather ignore problems, hoping that they will go away. The person who always is first to get uncomfortable and start making noises can be seen as negative

The person attracts all the group's negative energy about that attribute.

or a troublemaker. In the early days of our community, my workshop partner David was the one person who always brought up the problems, especially the interpersonal ones. Being impatient and fairly loud, he would confront the problem person(s) before the rest of us had really gotten on board, and tended to be more brashly confrontational than the rest of us were comfortable with. As a result, he started being seen as more of a problem, and less of a positive force in the group. Once he realized what was happening to him through this process, he asked the rest of us to begin to take more of the load that he had been carrying. We accepted that we had more responsibility for identifying and correcting problems than we had been fulfilling. Our request to him to return was that he try his best to back off and let us learn to do the work at our own pace and with our own style. This is not easy work for most of us to do; it's

garden and keep our head down. The turning point for me came when I realized the pain my inaction was causing my friend David. If others of us can share the work of identifying and confronting problems, we spread out a load that can burden and isolate an individual. Fourth, the person may be keeping group discourse open to a range of options that would be closed to discussion if their perspective were lacking. What could be interpreted as

Only when the "angriest" or "most" person leaves does that negative quality seem to magically spring up in another person.



laziness might provide clues that the rest of us are working too hard and inefficiently, facing imminent burnout. What might seem to be bourgeois materialism in an ascetic community could be a call for a slightly wider range of lifestyle options that would increase the community's long term stability. In our community, there is Andy, who is blessed/cursed with always being able to see both sides of every situation. It often feels to others that he is just playing devil's advocate to stir things up. When the rest of the group was

st. John's wort for anxiety, nerves, depression,

LEMON Balm for Calm

CatechuLa for clarity in communication

Valerian to CHILL out

Cannabis for reflection & Relaxation

its OKAY to Pick & choose yer friends, but JUDGE NOT...

Things are different for different people. Use your best judgment when ingesting or working your own